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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses alternative schools that serve students with special needs. The evolution of alternative education is outlined and several kinds of alternatives are discussed: schools for the gifted, the vocationally-oriented, and the disruptive, and multiethnic and basic skills programs. Alternative schools for problem students appear to be the most feasible of these programs for most districts. Research is reviewed that indicates that although academic achievement improvements are modest for problem students in alternative programs, attitude changes are significant. Students seem to develop positive attitudes toward themselves and their schools. The research review concludes that additional experimentation with alternative education is needed. The paper concludes with several recommendations to facilitate the successful implementation of alternative programs: (1) the schools should be funded at the same level as other district programs; (2) schools should be implemented within existing school structures; (3) program and curriculum goals should be clearly defined and utilized; (4) implementation should involve clearly defined and documented procedures; (5) mechanisms for evaluation must be included; and (6) a commitment to the success of alternative programs and a willingness to persevere are required. (Author/JM)

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ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS:

AN OVERVIEW

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The past decade has witnessed the emergence of thousands of institutions purporting to be alternatives to conventional forms of education. The aims of these schools have varied. Some have attempted to serve the special interests and capabilities of the gifted and talented. Others have dealt with students who presented discipline problems. Still others emphasized special career programs.

Most alternative schools have been based on the assumption that certain types of students are best served outside the limits of the traditional classroom. The reasoning behind this assumption is two-fold. On one hand, it is concluded that the broad demographic base of the regular classroom makes it ill-suited to the needs of individuals who have special abilities and/or problems. With the range of needs present in the classroom, it is impossible to deal adequately with cases which require added attention. On the other hand, it is believed that stretching regular curricula to serve such individuals would weaken the effectiveness of such programs.[1] If meeting the needs of these students occurs at the expense of the larger population, the goal may not be worth the price.

From these theoretical bases, alternative schools emerge as adjuncts to conventional schooling. They become means for individual districts or groups of districts to have their proverbial cake and eat it too, to provide for specific types of students without disrupting central programs.

The obvious attractiveness of such an approach to education has led to the establishment of alternative schools in areas throughout the nation. The results of these efforts, a mixture of stunning successes and dismal failures, have demonstrated that much remains to be understood about this method of learning. Demonstration programs of varying forms continue to be implemented, and several more years may pass before alternative schools advance beyond the experimental stage.[2]

Because of these conditions, it seems important that school systems wishing to become involved with this approach gain a thorough appreciation of the work which has already been carried out in alternative education. An understanding of the origins and development of these schools will contribute to the improvement of local programming and the limitation of waste and inefficiency in this area.[3]

The Evolution of Alternative Education

Although interest in alternative schools has undergone a marked revival during recent years, the concept is hardly new to American education. Many colonial schools, especially those in New York and other northern areas, were founded as alternatives to English institutions. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the pattern of establishing American alternatives to European models eventually encouraged the development of educational alternatives to established models. Thus, Roger Williams established the schools of Rhode Is'and when the educational system of Massachusetts no longer suited his beliefs.

As the nation moved west during the nineteenth century, the numbers of alternative schools first increased, then stabilized. In the early years of the century a seemingly endless variety of religious groups, political organizations, and clubs developed educational institutions to serve and further their interests. The economic dislocations of the post-Civil War period curtailed much of this growth, yet private schools survive as a major component of the national educational community.[4]

The twentieth century has seen alternative education assume new forms. As the cost of schools has risen, their maintenance has increasingly become a public responsibility. While various societal and philosophical patterns have

continued to foster the development of private alternatives, in many areas, non-traditional education has also attracted the interest of public educators. Public involvement in alternative learning has taken numerous forms. In some instances, actual demonstration programs have been implemented by urban, rural, and suburban districts. In other cases, public schools have borrowed teaching techniques and organizational principles which were already tested in private institutions.[5]

At the present time, it seems clear that the public schools, that great network which forms the basis of American education, have become ground on which the value or lack of value of alternative schools will be demonstrated or disproven. A view of experiences already gained in this area lends insights into directions and attainments of the movement at this time.

Directions of Alternative Education

Non-traditional education continues to be a multi-faceted endeavor. The gifted, the vocationally-oriented, and the disruptive have become clienteles for a range of alternative schools. Increasingly, however, it has become apparent that public schools cannot and should not implement wholly separate curricula for all categories of students with special needs.

The education of the gifted is a particular case in point. Interest in students with varying degrees of talent has mushroomed during recent years. While many school systems have attempted to further the social and emotional, as well as the intellectual, growth of gifted children by integrating advanced learning with established social and curricular patterns, a few have attempted to establish wholly segregated programs. Authorities on the gifted have concluded, however, that if special, separate programming is required in this area, it is best implemented on the campus, rather than in the district. The

local district usually does not possess the resources to develop sophisticated training for the very brightest of school children.[6]

Vocationally-oriented students are another group which may be difficult to serve through alternative curricula within public school districts. Career training is one area of learning which, even in its elementary stages, frequently requires sophisticated, expensive equipment. Often, such equipment is beyond the means of individual districts. Accordingly, alternative education in this area has frequently taken the form of cooperative arrangements spanning several individual systems. In a number of instances, such pooling arrangements have made possible the development of curricula far beyond the means of small districts.[7]

If alternative programs such as the education of the gifted and vocational training seem beyond the means of single school systems, other non-traditional programs seem to hold the possibility, if not the promise of success. Objectives which are limited in scope and require modest commitments of resources are within the realm of implementation in individual districts.

One such area is the education of distruptive students. This is one concern which has often been conveniently overlooked by the American school community. Interest in the nature of course content has frequently upstaged concern with less glamorous topics such as student behavior. The contrast between the ease of implementing new curricula and the difficulty of dealing with disruptive individuals has probably also contributed to the pattern. Yet Gallup polls and other opinion surveys have demonstrated that discipline continues to be a major, if not the primary difficulty currently facing public education. As such, discipline constitutes an excellent concern for alternative schools to address.[8]

As implemented in many areas of the nation, alternative programs which deal with student discipline perform a dual function. As separate programs, they offer instruction geared to the special learning and behavioral patterns of disruptive students. In this context, they employ techniques and teaching strategies not suited to the regular classroom. By removing disorderly students from classrooms, alternative schools also help improve the academic environment in those settings. With the need to deal with extreme behavior problems eliminated, large groups of students may more easily concentrate on the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills.[9]

Other forms of the alternative school also exist. In some areas, the approach has emphasized multicultural and/or multiethnic instruction. In others, training in the so-called basic skills has formed the curriculum. Data on all of these approaches continues to be accumulated. From the present perspective, it seems that the type of alternative program chosen is highly dependent on the precise needs of the individual district. Obviously certain programs, such as those for the gifted and the vocationally-oriented, are beyond the means of most school systems. Multicultural and basic skills training are within the reach of many areas, if it is concluded that such instruction cannot be accomplished within established curricula.

Alternative schools for the disruptive student, of all of the approaches outlined above, probably have the widest applicability. Rising concerns with school discipline indicate that the public may demand increasing experimentation in this area.[10]

Under these circumstances, it seems profitable to examine the record of alternative programs which totally or partially deal with disciplinary problems. Through such a consideration, insights concerning these efforts, as well as the more general character of the alternative approach, may emerge.

Outcomes of Alternative Schools

Like those of standard educational mechanisms, the outcomes of alternative schools may logically be divided according to the aims of the programs. While no two of these efforts share precisely the same goals, the themes of academic and behavioral progress receive frequent emphasis. Accordingly, a general analysis of the results of alternative education inevitably concentrates on these two factors.

Evaluation of the academic outcomes of alternative schools presents a number of problems. Authorities point out that the use of non-traditional methods of testing, in many programs, makes comparison difficult. It has been noted that these efforts often 'resist measurement on traditional scales'. If alternative programs are to prepare individuals for life in the larger society, however, it is imperative that some standardization of testing be attained. If this could not be accomplished, the learning accomplished in these programs might have little or no validity outside the special classrooms.[11]

Academic achievement is a crucial criterion of the effectiveness of alternative education. One author notes that, despite the fact that many of these efforts "... were more concerned with affective or behavioral changes than basic skills, success in the latter tends to determine the ultimate fate of alternatives."[12] Within this context, it is important that both standardized tests and other evaluations of progress be analyzed. Only an examination of data from both of these measures will provide information concerning the external and the internal validity of these curricula.

The latest data concerning the achievement of students in a wide range of alternative school programs, designed either totally or partially for the disruptive student, indicates that substantial progress has not been attained. In

a 1977-78 survey of efforts throughout the nation, Daniel Linden Duke and Irene Muzio pointed out that most academic improvements registered on standardized tests were very limited. In both reading and mathematics testing, only minimal gains were reported.[13]

Investigators Duke and Muzio have offered numerous qualifiers to their conclusions concerning achievement test results. They note, for instance, that evaluation of many programs was conducted without the use of standardized tests. In other cases, they reported that comparison data on control groups was not available. For students who registered slight gains, they observe that the value of these improvements must be balanced against the probability that these individuals would have dropped out of school altogether, had alternative programs not been available.[14]

Nonstandardized evaluations of the academic progress of students in alternative programs may also be used to ascertain the progress of these curricula. Although not as useful for comparison purposes as achievement tests, these internal measures may provide information concerning the content and direction of the instruction provided.

In their general examination of these efforts of alternative programs, Duke and Muzio also conducted an examination of a wide range of nonstandardized data. Their conclusions in this area were mixed. The investigators noted that, in the better programs, substantial gains in academic averages were possible. In one institution, over half of the students eventually attained grade averages of 80 percent or better. Grade averages in specific subject areas indicated that progress in such basic courses as the language arts and mathematics might be difficult to attain. In many of the schools where gains in general achievement were registered, for instance, little or no progress was observed in the language arts. In various programs, it was found that supposed

increases in grades were mitigated by the fact that large numbers of students had received 'no credit' or 'incomplete' scores in mathematics.[15]

Reports from individual alternative school programs generally substantiate the conclusions concerning the academic achievement of students produced by Duke and Muzio. Individuals enrolled in an alternative schools project in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania did not meet established academic objectives. Mathematics and reading scores of those in the alternative curriculum were significantly lower than those of students in a control group.[16] A nontraditional school for individuals with behavioral problems, established in Grand Rapids, Michigan produced some gains in scores of standardized reading tests. Through a concentrated effort, involving large amounts of individual assistance, enrollees outscored members of a control group, which received no such help. In the mathematics curriculum of the Grand Rapids program, where the emphasis was placed on classroom, rather than individual instruction, no "real change in pre- and post-test scores" was noted.[17] In the Home Base School, an alternative educational effort in Watertown, Massachusetts, it was found that the special curriculum produced a different effect. While a substantial proportion of enrollees showed improved performance as a result of the instruction, an equally large fraction registered lower achievement.[18]

A number of implications may be drawn from the record of alternative schools in the area of academic achievement. Progress on standardized tests appears to be minimal or absent. Gains in nonstandardized evaluation measures seem to occur, although the validity of the instruments used may vary widely. Clearly, the special curricula which are being implemented in many areas have not produced any general increase in student achievement.

This should not imply that such an increase is impossible. The Grand Rapids Program suggests that massive amounts of individual assistance can

produce marked improvements. The feasibility of offering such assistance must be answered by individual districts, however. Above all, the academic experience with demonstration alternative schools implies that, if there is a formula which will enable such efforts to raise the achievement levels of large numbers of students, it has not yet been discovered. It appears that simply implementing an alternative program like any other curriculum is not enough. Careful research and planning will be required to focus on the exploration of new methods and techniques of instruction, rather than on mere replication of existing ones in different physical settings.

Additional insights into the outcomes generated by alternative schools may be gained from an examination of data concerning the behavioral progress of students. Because affective concerns form the basis for most efforts implemented in individual districts, results in this area have become the object of widespread interest.

In their analysis of progress of alternative schools across the nation, investigators Duke and Muzio observed two types of affective objectives: those regarding student attitudes toward self, and those relating to student attitude toward the school. In almost all instances, they concluded, changes in these areas were recorded and evaluated through self-reporting instruments. In addition to these measures, Duke and Muzio also examined information concerning student attendance, work habits, and responsibility.

The investigators reported that most self-reporting surveys registered gains in student attitude toward self and school. Almost all of the instruments contained some reference to improvements in self-concept. A lesser, although a significant level of positive change in attitude toward school was also noted. Analysis of information from a variety of programs showed that enrollees saw teachers as more positive and ready to help than those in regular classrooms.

Most students also seemed interested in returning to the alternative programs during the next academic year. A majority of those surveyed also felt that the programs should continue and expand.[19]

Attendance and other records examined by Duke and Muzio reinforced the conclusion that the nontraditional programs had produced changes in student attitudes. Many of the schools surveyed reported daily attendance rates of 75 percent or above. One program boasted a rate of 90 percent, although evaluators were quick to observe that enrollees frequently 'cut' individual classes or portions of school days. Only one institution sampled reported that absenteeism actually increased in the alternative setting.[20]

The decrease in absentee rates observed in alternative schools, combined with other information, implies that alternative education may be contributing to decreases in dropout rates. Although it is impossible to establish whether a given student would have left school, had the alternative curriculum been unavailable, attendance comparisons and other data seem to indicate that the nontraditional efforts are helping to slow dropout rates in public schools.[21]

Information concerning the work habits and responsibility of individuals in alternative programs forms another important block of data concerning the attitudes of students in these curricula. As in the case of most other affective areas, progress in this connection has often been difficult to evaluate.

One major survey found that mixed results had been attained. A majority of those students identified demonstrated initiative by undertaking independent projects. Teachers noted, however, that the projects were rarely related to classroom activities. A majority of students surveyed also engaged in some type of community service activity, although doubt was cast on the quality and duration of their service. Fewer enrollees than expected actually participated in the evaluation of school programs.[22]

The pattern of results recorded in survey data concerning alternative programs was mirrored in the experiences of a number of specific programs. Evaluation of an effort in the Cleveland suburb of Beachwood, Ohio revealed that students seemed enthused and extrememly positive about the program. A number of teachers questioned the commitments of students, however. Many indicated that the program made little effort to channel useful enthusiasm into effective educational outcomes.[23] An alternative program developed by the city school district of Los Angeles, California also generated substantial enthusiasm from enrollees. Evaluators observed, however, that the school's pupils 'studied rarely or not at all'.[24] The pattern of ample enthusiasm, accompanied by a lack of long term commitment, also surfaced in the Markles Flats Junior High School, an alternative effort implemented in Ithaca, New York. Evaluators summarized the difficulty in Ithaca as one of 'balancing freedom and responsibility'. Teachers and administrators concluded that leadership roles were never clearly defined. They noted that "although some highly motivated students were able to successfully pursue an independently selected program, a number of other students were not able to function well in an atmosphere of relative freedom."[25]

As in the case of the academic outcomes, the behavioral results of these efforts contain numerous ambiguities. A few conclusions do emerge. Almost universally, students in nontraditional curricula seem to develop positive attitudes toward themselves and toward their schools. In many cases, these attitudes apparently triggered interest in special projects and civic activities. Unfortunately, however, alternative programs have apparently failed to transform youthful enthusiasm into youthful commitment. Increased attendance rates and a lower incidence of dropping out has yet to be followed by the development of work habits and responsibility.

Available data indicates that program planners, rather than students, may be responsible for this condition. A number of alternative curricula seem to lack the effective structure and planning which is necessary for the development of meaningful, long term change in individuals.

A Few General Conclusions

The preceding pages contain a wide range of information regarding the origins and development of alternative school programs. The path by which these efforts have reached the public schools has been delineated. The present record of such programs has been surveyed. Having waded through this mass of information, it becomes profitable to distill a few observations concerning the present status of this movement. Such conclusions might reflect the present state of the art as well as provide the basis for future efforts in this area.

Most questions concerning alternative schools properly revolve around outcomes. Because this approach is still at the demonstration stage, programs which are eventually replicated on a general basis will be those which produce results. Most studies and evaluations have focused on academic and affective-behavioral results.

Small gains in achievement have been recorded in various alternative efforts. Unfortunately, many of these improvements have been registered outside the crucial language arts and mathematics areas. At the present time, substantial efforts remain to be carried out if alternative schools are to be justified on academic grounds.

More favorable results have been attained in affective concerns. Positive changes in attitudes, as evidenced by self-reported opinions and attendance rate increases, have been recorded. Yet these results remain to be translated into long term behavior patterns. Mechanisms which promote the development of

work habits and responsibility among alternative school populations have yet to be demonstrated.

The academic and behavioral information concerning alternative approaches suggests that much remains to be accomplished. Unless increases in academic achievement can be produced among enrollees, nontraditional schools seem justifiable only as holding pens which keep disruptive individuals out of regular classroom environments. Increases in enthusiasm will avail little if they cannot be translated into productive activities and habits. Positive attitudes which can be sustained only within the alternative school will soon disappear when the student encounters the larger society.

Such are the hard facts which seem to surround the alternative education movement. They are disconcerting, yet they seem to suggest other, more hopeful conclusions.

Above all, present data recommends additional experimentation in the area of alternative schools. The results of programs already undertaken suggest that additional planning, structure, and evaluation will be required in future efforts.

A number of abortive projects have apparently lacked well-defined goals. Authorities such as M. Scott Norton point out that the lack of a process of goal development will doom any alternative program from the outset.[26]

Beyond goal development, effective planning demands a structured evaluation process. Project evolution must be monitored on a continuing basis. Students must be motivated through continuous application of academic and behavioral curricula.[27]

Existing information also suggests that available resources must be applied in a manner more consistent than has hitherto been the case. A tremendous amount of effort is required for the operation of an alternative

program. Disruptive students typically require much greater attention than those in regular classes. Often school districts do not possess all the resources necessary for the instruction of such individuals.

In this rein Accordingly, community involvement must be heightened.

The need for parental and community involvement in alternative education reinforces the need for structuring and systematization of these efforts. A wealth of local enthusiasm, injudiciously applied, may confuse the purpose and operation of even the most effective curriculum.[28]

In addition to its importance to the success of individual nontraditional programs, proper planning and management is crucial to the general development of the approach. Because alternative schools are still at the demonstration and experimentation stage, replication of successful models, and avoidance of unsuccessful techniques, will be possible only if such developments are structured and documented. Success in this area has, admittedly, been something less than universal, and the approach will profit from any additional documentation concerning methods and techniques.

In light of these developments, one other conclusion concerning the present and future of alternative schools might be in order. It has been noted that this approach is still in the demonstration phase. Many of the implications of this fact have already been discussed, yet its general connotation also deserves emphasis. As demonstration projects, alternatives are tentative, rather than permanent in nature. Dedicated to the development of more effective education, they serve the future rather than the present. Unlike established elementary and secondary programs, alternative schools are what Leonard Kaplan calls, 'risk-takers', institutions tied, not to individuals, personalities, or even geographic areas, but to the search for truth and progress in American education.[29]

Implementation of Alternative Programs

Analysis of past experiences in alternative education produces a number of conclusions. Yet the greatest challenge in this area is translation of the lessons gained from past experiences into positive, constructive efforts. Only through the development of worthwhile functioning structures will alternative curricula make significant contributions to American schools.

In the implementation of alternative approaches, major attention must be given to educational environments. Present experience suggests that even the most innovative projects will have greater chance of success if developed within established structures. Efforts which have attempted to operate outside traditional funding mechanisms or institutional frameworks have almost always met with failure.[30]

This pattern has been particularly apparent in the cases of those approaches which have been supported with new or nontraditional funding. Almost all efforts which have abolished existing financial supports, as well as existing learning frameworks have been short-lived. Adding financial innovation to the difficult task of curriculum innovation is apparently inviting disaster.

The best means of support for alternative projects seems to be the same funding which underwrites the rest of programming at the district level. Experience suggests that this approach can begin with very small expenditures, and expand if conditions dictate. If minimal amounts of money cannot be raised within district budgets, the commitment necessary to begin alternative curricula itself may be lacking.[31]

Experience also recommends that implementation of alternative curricula occur within established school organizations. For the most part, those programs which have attempted to function outside all of the constraints of traditional curricula have met with failure.

Implementation of alternative curricula within the frameworks of local districts is desirable for a number of reasons. It is an efficient course of action, taking advantage of the human and physical resources which exist within established structures. It is also practical, recognizing that through differing methods, alternative programs, like established curricula, must produce educated individuals. It is also a realistic, carrying with it the assumption that no effort can exist in a vacuum, outside the structures of direction and accountability which mark the remainder of the society.[32]

The need to implement alternative education within existing funding mechanisms and school structures cannot be overstressed. Innovative curriculum development has always been a formidable task. Research demonstrates that the difficulties in this area often verge on overwhelming. Under these circumstances, to also attempt abolition of traditional financial supports and organizational structures is absurd. It will lead to failure of the demonstration effort istself, while wasting money that would have been more profitably employed in other areas.[33]

Within the context of local districts, it is recommended that alternative curricula be designed and implemented in a highly structured manner. Through such an approach programs will be readily assessable by sponsor districts at periodic intervals. Successful efforts will also be replicable by other systems which desire to implement proven methodologies.

At the outset of any implementation process, program goals should be clearly defined and utilized. Too often, experience has shown that project goals remain vague or ill-defined. It is not enough for those involved to have "an idea" of what the goals are. These aims must be translated into concise sentences and committed to paper.

If a firmly structured process of goal-definition does not occur, project aims will shift as the effort develops, and fragmentation of the general direction will occur as staff turnover occurs and individual perceptions diverge. All of these factors will shift the original purpose of the program and water-down its effect. In an area in which success has been the exception, neither of these possibilities can be risked.[34]

A number of goals for alternative curricula have been suggested in efforts already attempted. One of the most universal and worthwhile of these has been to provide the "educational experiences necessary to motivate the student to complete his or her education to at least the high school level."[35]

Under this general heading, a number of contributing objectives have been recommended. These include:

1. "Fostering maximum positive change in each student by assisting in meeting the unique requirements of the individual's educational, social, and personal life;
2. Providing social and educational skills necessary for positive personal development and to gain proper attitudes for successful involvement as a citizen in the community; and
3. Coordinating efforts with other school, community, state and federal agencies and programs"[36] necessary to achieve these objectives.

Other goals and objectives for alternative programs have also been utilized. Work-study efforts have been implemented for those individuals who neither seek a high school diploma nor return to traditional school settings. General approaches have endeavored to build constructive attitudes without inculcating skills and knowledge. Other curricula have attempted to meet the needs of disoriented students. Specific objectives, such as those detailed above, have aimed at the attainment of these goals.[37]

The process of selecting goals for alternative programs is essentially a policy decision. As such, it remains the prerogative of the school boards and chief executive officers of individual districts. Once goals have been selected, however, the implementation process begins. At this point, the task of work of elaborating structures and mechanisms for the attainment of project goals must proceed in a logical, progressive fashion.

To a large extent, the work of implementation must occur in an hierarchial manner. Goals are subdivided into objectives which will contribute to the general purpose. Objectives are divided into subobjectives. Activities are geared to satisfy subobjectives.

This task becomes a long and arduous process, yet it cannot be avoided. To seek an easier, quicker, nondocumented approach is to make the same error committed by those would proceed without defining project goals. Procedural definition will not guarantee success, but lack of it will guarantee failure. There is simply no way to implement new and innovative curricula without clearly defined and documented procedures.38

In the design and documentation of objectives and activities for alternative curricula, it is curcial that major project goals be ingrained into program practices and carefully monitored. This is particularly true if a single goal, such as the motivation of students to complete their education at the high school level, is present. Experience reveals that students who participate in alternative education are frequently those who lack self-direction and purpose. Under these circumstances, reiteration and elaboration of primary requirements throughout the curriculum are a must.[39]

Probably the greatest challenge in the development of structures for alternative curricula involves the creation of activities which will actually

bring about the attainment of goals and objectives. Along with the actual definition of aims and purposes, this process probably constitutes a most formidable task in alternative programming.

A number of candidate activities have been suggested by the range of alternative efforts already attempted. These efforts fall into a few general categories. The identification of so-called holding factors which motivate students to remain in school is significant, since it makes minimal levels of instruction possible. Meeting the unique needs and interests of students in alternative schools is a core concern. A need exists for diagnosis of personal problems and needs, and the design of approaches to meet those needs. Orientation to the world of work has also been pursued in alternative education. Efforts have been made to relate program activities to the preparation of students for functioning in actual work environments. Intensive efforts have also concentrated on the development of social skills necessary to independent living. This has been a particular focus of curricula oriented toward disruptive individuals.[40]

The identification of activities within any of these areas which will bring about the attainment of program goals requires an intensive examination of available data. At its most general level, it necessitates a comprehensive survey of literature generated by established efforts. Bare familiarity with the outlines of projects, as described in literature searches or summaries is not sufficient. Only arduous analysis of detailed literature and evaluation of the effectiveness of the procedures employed will aid in narrowing the range of options.

In addition to literature review and analysis, direct recourse to authorities in the field and actual operating models is frequently necessary. Conversations with individuals knowledgeable in the area enable the interested party to test

possible activities and procedures against a range of experience. Visits to operating models encourage those implementing new programs to test their own notions against actual situations and to borrow useful techniques.[41]

Once activities which contribute to the attainment of relevant goals and objectives have been selected, they must be integrated into a framework which will produce implementation in a logical and systematic manner. Timetables must be drawn up which specify activities, along with resources and other prerequisites for their completion. The assembly of all of these components will produce a comprehensive implementation plan.

Beyond the development of an implementation structure, the construction of effective alternative curricula demands mechanisms for evaluation and program modification. Within the context of program structure, the means for gauging results and producing change must be included.

Evaluation is a difficult aspect of program implementation in any area. There is always a tendency to flatter a project by emphasizing successes and ignoring shortcomings. In an area such as alternative schools, where failures have been plentiful, this temptation is particularly strong.

Yet the same detailed structures which make implementation possible also facilitate evaluation in this area. The definition of goals and objectives makes it possible to compare results with projections. A careful and specific elaboration of objectives and subobjectives, at the outset of a program allows administrators to pinpoint problem areas with a high degree of accuracy. Once problems have been identified, judgments can be made concerning trouble-shooting approaches. In some instances, reallocation of resources may be required. In others, additional or substitute activities may be necessitated.[42]

Just as implementation plans suggest the outlines of program evaluation, evaluation mechanisms imply directions for modification and change. The localization of problem areas produced in evaluation sets the environment for change by identifying concerns and areas where existing mechanisms are ineffective. Evaluation may also suggest alternatives for change, pinpointing deficiencies in resource inputs or product outputs.

Modification and wholesale change of alternative curricula may themselves lead to further developments. Because of the inability of program planners to control for all variables, some experimentation with solutions is inevitable. Again, however, the more detailed the implementation structure, the greater will be the precision achieved in the localization of problems, and the less will be the need for experimentation.[43]

None of the conclusions outlined in the foregoing discussion should prove startling. If program implementation in alternative programs were an easy task, extensive surveys of approaches to the problem, such as that contained here, would be unnecessary.

Detailed structuring of alternative curricula, such as that detailed here is beneficial for a number of reasons. It allows for due consideration and hypothetical testing of possibilities before actual implementation occurs. It also enables implementation to occur within a general perspective. Finally, it promotes continuity of activity by suggesting subsequent steps. Thus, objectives form criteria for evaluation and evaluation suggests change.

As has already been noted, the extensive planning and implementation described here is no guarantee of success. Experience does recommend, however, that without them, failure may be all but assured. It is slight comfort

that all of the effort in the world will not insure effective programming. Yet there is simply no other logical way to proceed.

Beyond all of these ingredients, a commitment to the success of alternative programming and a willingness to persevere in this endeavor are, of course, required. Such dedication and patience is necessary to turn the mechanisms suggested here into living, breathing efforts which will benefit scores of young people.[44] This kind of commitment recognizes the challenge and complexity of this most difficult task, and approaches solutions in a reasoned, methodical fashion.

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